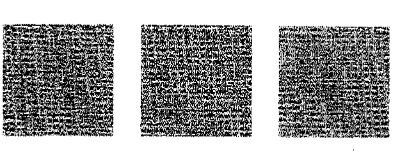
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a Companion to Medieval Art, ed. Conrad Rudolph

11



The Concept of *Spolia*

Dale Kinney

Spolia are hot. An eruption of conferences, seminars, and publications in the past two or three decades has put a once obscure antiquarian subject in the limelight. Yet despite the increasing familiarity of the word *spolia*, the subject remains difficult to grasp in its entirety. Textbooks do not include it. The Grove *Dictionary of Art* has no main entry for *spolia*, only a few paragraphs buried under other headings: "Masonry, II" (vol. 20), and "Rome, VII. Antiquarian revivals" (vol. 26). Most of the literature on *spolia* is in German, followed by Italian and French, with hardly any English or American publications before the 1990s. The only comprehensive monograph is in Italian.

The subject denoted by *spolia* is materials or artifacts in reuse. As indicated by the subheading in the *Dictionary of Art*, initially *spolia* were reused bits of ancient Rome: the second-century reliefs on the fourth-century Arch of Constantine, or the ancient column shafts and capitals in St Peter's and other Christian basilicas.[1] Contemporary art historians use the word *spolia* more loosely, to refer to any artifact incorporated into a setting culturally or chronologically different from that of its creation.

As a label, *spolia* is both metaphorical and anachronistic. A Latin word meaning "spoils" or anything "stripped" from someone or something, "*spolia*" was coined as a term for reused antiquities by artist-antiquarians active in Rome around 1500. This use of *spolia* postdates medieval Latin, in which the word retained its classical, military meaning of "things taken by force." In medieval texts, reused objects or materials are called by their proper names, "columns," "marble," "sarcophagi," etc. This point would be merely pedantic if the metaphor did not have connotations that favor or even foster triumphalist and appropriationist interpretations.

Spolia are not an exclusively medieval topic; on the contrary, reuse is a universal response to limitations of technology or resources. If stone blocks, bricks, and roof tiles are more easily obtained secondhand than manufactured, builders will

reuse them. It is far less laborious to melt down existing coins or vessels for recasting than it is to mine new gold and silver. Parchment can be scraped clean for new writing, and ivory plaques can be recarved. It is obvious why such forms of expedient reuse can be found in all cultures that employ durable materials.

Harder to explain is the reuse of culturally specific objects for non-pragmatic purposes, as ornament, especially when, like the reliefs of pagan emperors on the Arch of Constantine, the reused objects seem to contradict the message or purpose of their new setting. Such is the case with the gems, cameos, ivory plaques, and sarcophagi carrying profane or pagan imagery that were frequently reused in Christian contexts during the Middle Ages. The seemingly subversive effects of this practice have intrigued scholars of *spolia* for centuries.

Despite a long historiography, *spolia* are not a unified field of study. Modern scholarship on reused artifacts tends to form national traditions: with notable exceptions, Germans write about Ottonian art and architecture, the French write about medieval France, the Italians about Italy, the English about England. With no medieval patrimony of their own, Americans have ventured into all of these discourses occasionally. Although they frequently intersect, the separate threads of scholarship do not all have the same source or take the same directions. There is no common methodology. Rather than a coherent category, *spolia* might better be considered a theme of categories like architecture and sculpture, a theme that tends to be brought up in conjunction with other themes like the survival of classical antiquity or *renovatio*. *Spolia* also resonate with prominent themes of postmodern cultural criticism, such as appropriation, *bricolage*, historicism, the fragment, and ruin.

History

The label *spolia* applies most clearly to objects and materials that are obtained by despoliation, that is by robbing them from another object or site. This form of reuse is typically architectural, and in the Roman colonies of Gaul and Britain it was begun by the Romans themselves. The defensive city walls thrown up throughout Gaul in the third century were packed with stone recovered from damaged or abandoned cemeteries, temples, baths, and other public structures. In the Middle Ages these same walls became quarries for church builders tempted by the well-cut facing blocks that concealed the rubble inside. A twelfth-century chronicle reports that Charlemagne's chapel at Aachen was built with the "squared stones" of the wall of Verdun, and a document (817–25) of Louis the Pious grants permission to Archbishop Ebbo of Reims to take material from his city's wall to reconstruct Reims Cathedral.[2]

When rising walls were not available for spoliation, builders might dig for stone on the known sites of Roman habitation. One frequently cited episode is the excavation of Roman Verulamium, across the river from St Albans Abbey, by successive tenth-century abbots planning to build a new church. Abbot Eadmar

unearthed not only the squared stones, roof tiles, and columns that he needed, but also clay vessels, glass cinerary urns, "idols," coins, jewels, and carved gems.[3]

The reuse of Roman stone for building was normal until the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, especially in Britain. At that point it tapered off due to depleted supply, the technological and economic recovery that made it possible to resume new quarrying, and the novel design demands of Romanesque (or Norman) and Gothic architects.

Marble was always a special case. It was a luxury stone and its reuse was ornamental, not expedient. Even in Italy it had to be obtained secondhand, as the Mediterranean quarries that produced it were abandoned in late antiquity. Probably the best-known primary source pertaining to *spolia* is the passage in Einhard's biography of Charlemagne (*c.*825?) that reports that when the king "could not obtain the columns and marble for [his chapel at Aachen] from any place else," "he took the trouble to have them brought from Rome and Ravenna." A close second in familiarity is the claim by Abbot Suger of St Denis (*c.*1145), that when he rebuilt his abbey's church he was prepared to go to the Baths of Diocletian in Rome for columns to match those in the original seventh-century basilica, had the Lord not spared him the trouble by revealing a good source of marble in nearby Pontoise. Suger's ambition echoed Charlemagne's, as did that of the German King (and later Emperor) Otto I, who imported "precious marble, gold, and gems" to the church that he founded at Magdeburg in 955.[4]

Charlemagne probably intended the display of Roman marble (as well as porphyry and granite) *spolia* in his Palatine Chapel as a political gesture. Its scarcity and aesthetic appeal made marble desirable for other purposes as well, as an attribute of luxury or status. Marble was prized for the same qualities that drew medieval beholders to gems: its hardness, its capacity to take a glistening polish, and the variety and brilliance of color that polishing brings forth. The *Metrical Life of St Hugh of Lincoln* (bishop 1186–1200) praised the black stone that seemed like "an aristocrat of marbles" in Hugh's cathedral, "more polished than a fresh-growing fingernail, present[ing] a starry brilliance to the dazzled sight . . ."[5] This stone was not true marble, but a limestone quarried in England on the Isle of Purbeck. On the Continent, Romanesque and Gothic architecture virtually did away with marble, creating new aesthetic effects with spatial geometry and the virtuosic handling of local limestone and sandstone. Already in Ottonian architecture, marble played a diminished role compared to the previous millennium.

Outside the realm of architecture, reuse is most conspicuous in the treasury arts: reliquaries, Gospel book covers, processional and standing crosses, and jewelry.[6] Many of these artifacts incorporate older valuables such as Roman gems and cameos, Byzantine or early medieval metalwork and enamels, and Islamic rock crystals. Sensational examples include the Lothar Cross in Aachen (fig. 11-1), named for the intaglio portrait inscribed "King Lothar" (II? d.869) on the lower staff, which sports a magnificent three-layered sardonyx cameo portrait of the Roman Emperor Augustus (d.14) in the crossing; the Herimann

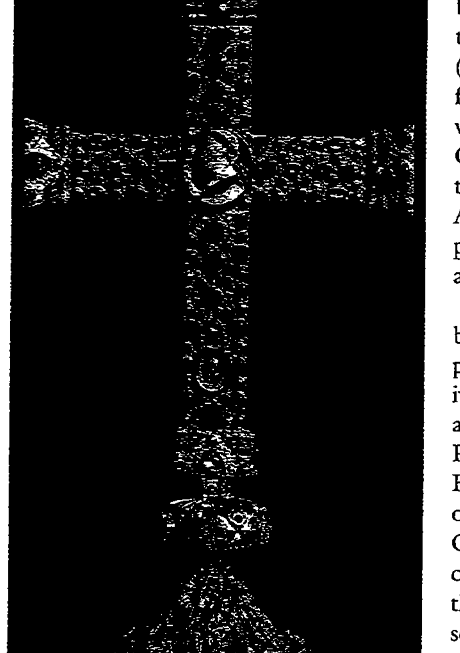


FIGURE 11-1 The Lothar Cross, *c*.980–1000. Aachen Domschatz. Photo: Bildarchiv Foto Marburg/Art Resource, NY.

Cross in Cologne (fig. 11-2), donated by Archbishop Herimann and his sister Ida, Abbess of St Maria im Kapitol (d.1060), on which a lapis lazuli female portrait, possibly of Augustus' wife Livia, functions as the head of Christ; and the Eagle Vase now in the Louvre (fig. 11-3), created for Abbot Suger by fitting an ancient porphyry vessel with the head, wings, and feet of an eagle made of gold.

Some composite objects seem blatantly syncretistic, like the golden pulpit ornamented with late antique ivory relief images of Isis, Bacchus, and Nereids that was given to the Palace Chapel at Aachen by King Henry II (r.1002–14); or the Shrine of the Three Kings in Cologne Cathedral (*c*.1200), which has large cameo images of Mars and Venus and the coronation of Nero prominently set on its front facade. Occasionally, inscriptions or other evidence show that pagan images were "converted" for Christian purposes by creative misreading, a process that modern scholars call *interpretatio christiana*. For example, the Gospel quotation "in principio erat verbum," added to a first-century sardonyx cameo donated to Chartres Cathedral in 1367, transformed an ancient relief of Jupiter with his eagle into St John and his symbol.[7]

Medieval thinking about gems is preserved in such inscriptions and in other texts. Treatises called "lapidaries" – like the especially popular verse example by Marbode, Bishop of Rennes (d.1123) – spell out the many medicinal and magical powers attributed to gemstones. Some lapidaries provide such detailed information about pagan iconography that their readers could have deciphered many of the ancient carvings on gems as well as we can today, if they were not misled by other factors. The *Book of Minerals* by the thirteenth-century Dominican philosopher Albertus Magnus updated the lapidary tradition with scientific, Aristotelian explanations, but also perpetuated the beliefs that the innate forces of stones could be enhanced by images and that some of the images seen on

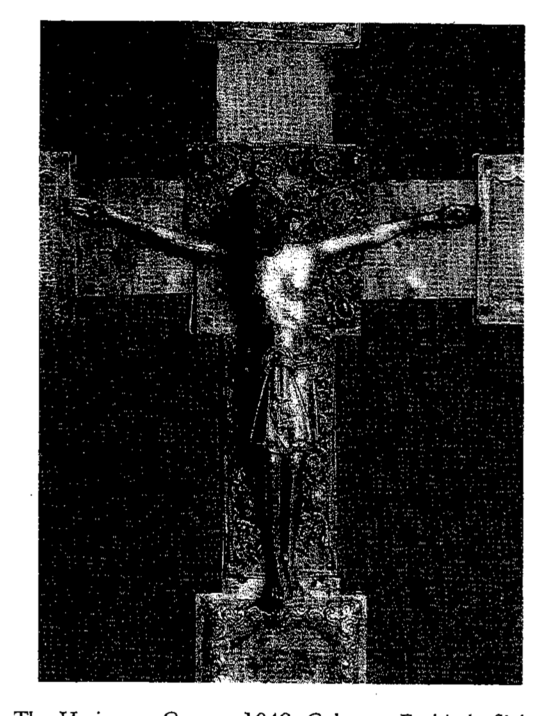


FIGURE 11-2 The Herimann Cross, *c*.1049. Cologne: Erzbischöfliches Diözesanmuseum. Photo: Bildarchiv Foto Marburg/Art Resource, NY.

gems were produced not by carving but by astrological influence during the formation of the stone. Albert thought that he had found one such "natural" image in an ancient portrait cameo on the Shrine of the Three Kings, known today as the Cameo of the Ptolemies.[8]

A different, emotional, and sensory relation to gems is recorded in the writings of Abbot Suger, who added many precious confections to the treasury of St Denis (fig. 11-4). Suger's memoirs describe his delight in materials, nostalgic appreciation of lost standards of craftsmanship, and pleasure at getting a good bargain.[9]

Except in the realm of craftsmanship, Abbot Suger did not distinguish old objects from new ones; all works in lustrous materials functioned equally as *ornamenta*. It is questionable whether he or any other medieval patron or craftsman thought of his ancient and other exotic ornaments as "reused."[10] Technically speaking, gems were reset rather than reused. For this and other reasons it is even more uncertain whether precious ornaments really belong to

FIGURE 11-3 The Eagle Vase of Suger, *c*.1140–4. Paris: Louvre. Photo: Bridgeman-Giraudon/Art Resource, NY.

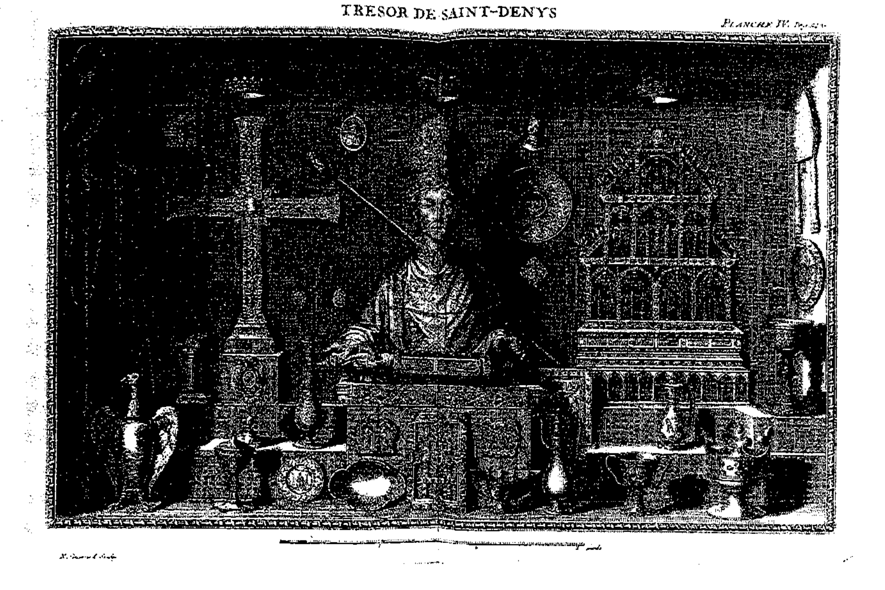


FIGURE 11-4 The Treasury of St Denis, including the Eagle Vase and other objects made for Abbot Suger. From Michel Félibien, *Histoire de l'abbaye royale de Saint-Denis en France*, plate IV. Paris: 1706. Photo: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Vaticano).

the discussion of *spolia*. Most Roman gems and other curios must have come into their donors' possession by inheritance, gift, commerce – all attested to by Suger – and excavation, as at Verulamium. Exceptions would include the treasures that came west after 1204 as a result of the Crusaders' plunder of Constantinople, which might be classified as true *spolia*, that is, *spolia* in the classical (and medieval) sense of the word. The same might be said of objects obtained via the Seljuk dispersion of the Fatimid treasury in Cairo in 1061, and of the Islamic luxury items that passed into Christian treasuries as a result of the Reconquest of Spain.

Historiography

The first general book on *spolia* was published in 1744 by Giovanni Marangoni: *Delle cose gentilesche e profane trasportate ad uso ed adornamento delle chiese*. Marangoni, an ecclesiastic, sought to demystify the presence of "pagan and profane" objects in Christian sacred spaces. The opposition of pagan and Christian became one of the most enduring themes in the study of *spolia*. In 1844 the antiquarian Thomas Wright invoked "the superstition of a barbarous age" to explain the appeal of Roman artifacts in nominally Christian Britain. In what he

described as the first archaeological analysis of ancient figured gems on liturgical objects (1932), G. A. S. Snijder proposed that the presence of each gem "prove[d] that somebody has gained a deeper insight into the power of God Almighty."[11]

The modern study of *spolia* began shortly after Snijder's article appeared, with an essay on the sculptural decoration of the Arch of Constantine by Hans Peter L'Orange (1939) and an article on spoliate colonnades in early Christian basilicas by F. W. Deichmann (1940). Both postulated the coherence of antique objects and their post-antique settings, rather than stressing oppositions. L'Orange maintained that the reuse of older figural reliefs on the fourth-century Arch of Constantine was deliberate and intelligible, not, as had been assumed, a makeshift response to lack of time or skill. He pointed to thematic echoes of the *spolia* in the reliefs newly made for the Arch, and proposed that they revealed a subtext in which both the original and the secondary meanings of the *spolia* are in play. The viewer who knows their original subjects can see the recontextualized second-century reliefs as images of Constantine the new Trajan, the new Hadrian, and the new Marcus Aurelius; that is, Constantine in the mold of the great good emperors of the past.[12]

Deichmann's similarly innovative article on "Columns and Order" in early Christian architecture argued that while the recycling of building materials was practiced in all ancient cultures, going back to Egypt and Persia, the incorporation of *spolia* into early Christian basilicas signaled something new. In conjunction with a new aesthetic preference for diversity and pattern, early Christian *spolia* constituted a new "order" that undermined and replaced the uniform Greek and Roman Orders. According to Deichmann, the new architectural order prevailed all around the Mediterranean from the fourth century to the eighth, when it degenerated into "chaotic" combinations of reused parts.[13]

Important as they were for the study of *spolia*, these essays had no perceptible effect on the scholarship on gems or architecture north of the Alps. Attention to architectural *spolia* was inhibited by national prejudices in favor of authentically French or German – that is, non-Roman – buildings, as well as by a paucity of examples after the eleventh century. Viollet-le-Duc (1859) observed the haphazard combinations of *spolia* in early medieval French churches with disdain: "Antique columns, often hewn of precious materials, were luxury objects, a sort of spoil with which they sought to embellish their homely buildings." Since he considered the Gothic style to be the supreme medieval architectural achievement, Viollet-le-Duc found any desire for marble among later medieval builders atavistic, and he dismissed Abbot Suger's scheme to import marble columns from Italy as a grandiose literary fiction.[14]

If they attended to *spolia* at all, twentieth-century architectural historians tended to follow Viollet-le-Duc in considering *spolia* an impediment to the development of new, characteristically medieval styles. Thus for Hans Jantzen (1947), Otto I's Magdeburg Cathedral with its imported columns and marble was a Carolingian throwback, as opposed to the church of St Michael at Hildesheim, where "a German architectural feeling drives out the Latin-antique."[15] Günter Bandmann, however, devoted a page to *spolia* in a book that considered medieval architecture not as a progression of styles but as bearer of meaning (1951). Bandmann noted that the taking of architectural *spolia* was a means of empowering or "consecrating" a new building by transferring to it pieces of a holy site that had existed somewhere else; Charlemagne's use of columns from Ravenna at Aachen was an example.[16] It was Bandmann's work rather than Deichmann's that ultimately stimulated interest in *spolia* in northern medieval architecture, at least in Germany.

An example of Bandmann's influence is Wolfgang Götz's interpretation of the east end of Magdeburg Cathedral (1966), where the spoliate column shafts originally imported by Otto I were reused again in the early thirteenth century as supports for statues in the upper stories of the choir. The interruption of the Gothic elevation by these relics had baffled and annoyed earlier scholars because, as Götz observed, they judged it only on the criterion of style. Götz explained the *spolia* as embodiments of the authority of their place of origin, understood in the thirteenth century to be the prior cathedral of Otto I as well as imperial Rome. By their presence in the choir they conferred upon the thirteenth-century bishop the same rights and status enjoyed by his tenth-century predecessor.[17] Götz was a pioneer; it was not until the 1980s that this type of interpretation became familiar.

The second dominant theme associated with *spolia*, after the pagan/Christian opposition, is the survival or influence of classical antiquity. Developed in German art history before World War II, this interest was transplanted to England and America when German-Jewish scholars fled the Nazis. The library of Aby Warburg, relocated from Hamburg to London in 1933, became an institute that is still dedicated to the classical tradition, "the theme which unifies the history of Western civilization."[18]

The first volume of the *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, published in 1937–8, contained an article by William Heckscher that responded to Snijder's interpretation of ancient gems on medieval book covers. Heckscher introduced a philosophical justification, noting that gems possessed the principal qualities of beauty prescribed by neo-Platonic aesthetic theory: wholeness and clarity or translucence. Intact, unblemished gems were the antithesis of ruin, the broken or imperfect, which was repugnant. Heckscher applied this rationale not only to book covers but also to Abbot Suger's scheme to take columns from the Baths of Diocletian to St Denis:

> The modern romanticist may protest that by breaking up [i.e., taking away] columns from the baths of Diocletian, Sugerius would have impaired recklessly the beauty of an antique site. Sugerius, however, considered the columns as units, beautiful in themselves, whereas the condition of the place as a whole . . . ranged for him under the category of disintegration and therefore worthlessness.

Heckscher stressed the conviction of medieval thinkers that their world was continuous with that of ancient Rome. The Roman past was "pagan," but its

relics could be adapted by ***interpretatio christiana***, as in the case of Suger's Eagle Vase. "Needless to say the eagle . . . superimposed upon the antique relic, is meant as a symbol of Christ."[19]

Another Warburg publication transposed the theme of classical influence into French. Jean Adhémar's *Influences antiques dans l'art du moyen âge française* of 1939 is a survey of the archaeological and literary evidence for the survival of classical ("Western") culture, especially Gallo-Roman artifacts, in medieval France. It includes many instances of Roman objects in medieval settings – altars, tombstones, sarcophagi, columns and capitals, statues, gems, diptychs – without distinguishing them from other, similar objects that survived without being reused. Preservation was Adhémar's driving interest, and he subsumed what we today might call *spolia* into the larger categories of "antiquities" and their "survival," as was typical of the Warburgian approach.[20]

Adhémar's book inspired some French followers, notably René Crozet, but the future of the Warburg school of scholarship was in English. William Heckscher's teacher, Erwin Panofsky, published his translation of Abbot Suger's writings on St Denis in Princeton in 1946. Brilliantly paralleling Suger's words with those of the fifth-century neo-Platonic philosopher "Pseudo-Dionysius," Panofsky claimed that the abbot understood the "light" and "clarity" of gems, precious metals, and glass as a means of neo-Platonic ascent from the world of matter to the immaterial world of God.[21] The neo-Platonic rationale applied to all precious objects, old and new, and like Suger himself, Panofsky paid no particular attention to reuse.

German scholars who remained in Germany tended to be skeptical of high-flown Warburgian intellectualism and to take a more intuitive and empirical approach to the same issues and objects. Hans Wentzel began his pioneering wartime article on medieval gems (1941) with a rebuff of Heckscher's "very wide-ranging speculations," asserting that his own conclusions were based on "the monuments alone." He declared flatly that with few exceptions, "the pre-Christian origin and pagan significance of the stones were unknown to the middle ages," when ancient gems were valued only for the rarity and beauty of their materials and for their amuletic effects. Wentzel claimed that most pagan gems were genuinely believed to be Christian, and gave the Herimann Cross as an example:[22]

> [The Cross] bears an antique Venus cameo as the head of Christ. This beautiful fully rounded head gives the Crucified an entirely unmedieval aspect. . . . It must have been an equally unusual sight around 1040. . . . This unique use can only have been prompted by the assumption that the cameo (doubtless discovered in the ground) was and could only be the head of the Saviour.

Of the numerous German publications on the theme of antiquity and the Middle Ages that appeared after World War II, only Richard Hamann-MacLean's long article of 1949–50 found a particular role for *spolia*. Calling them the earliest, "most basic, most material stage of the connection between the middle ages and antiquity," Hamann-MacLean offered a list of reasons why *spolia* might have been used: convenience, economy, aesthetic appreciation of materials or workmanship, the collecting impulse, and the belief in miracles and the magic of things (*Dingzauber*). Anticipating Bandmann, he identified Charlemagne's appropriation of Roman marbles for his church at Aachen as a "magic-political" use of *spolia*, unlike the incorporation of ancient marbles into eleventh-century churches, which he saw as strictly pragmatic. He observed that gems continued to be valued for their antiquity, exquisite craftsmanship, and supernatural powers long after the reuse of other ancient artifacts had ceased. The Herimann Cross was one example; he called it "a form of reified mystery," in which the antipathy of pagan and Christian was broken down by "the timeless numen of a precious substance."[23]

The decades of the 1950s and 1960s were marked by a few impressive monographic studies and particular discoveries, including Jean Taralon's stunning revelation (1955) that the golden head of the reliquary statue of St Foi at Conques is late antique, and Joseph Hoster's demonstration (1967) that the Cameo of the Ptolemies, stolen from the Shrine of the Three Kings in 1574, is in Vienna.[24] The most enduring monograph is Josef Deér's article on the Lothar Cross (1955). Refuting earlier opinions that the central sardonyx cameo was "converted" by *interpretatio christiana* (becoming the head of Christ), Deér argued that the cameo was actually recognized and employed for what it was, a Roman imperial portrait, knowingly "appropriated" by the Ottonian donor to represent himself.

On a more abstract level, Erwin Panofsky's grand synthesis of 1965, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, introduced the inspired aphorism "principle of disjunction" to describe the dissociation of classical form from classical content, which, in his view, made it possible for classical art to survive the Christian middle ages:

> [W]herever in the high and later Middle Ages a work of art borrows its form from a classical model, this form is almost invariably invested with a non-classical, normally Christian, significance; wherever in the high and later Middle Ages a work of art borrows its theme from classical poetry, legend, history or mythology, this theme is quite invariably presented in a non-classical, normally contemporary form.

Although it was not meant to explain *spolia*, Panofsky believed that the "principle of disjunction" accounted for antique gems that were relieved of their original meaning by *interpretatio christiana*, and he cited the Lothar Cross as an example.[25] The "principle of disjunction" continues to tease scholars of *spolia*, who were still responding to it in the 1990s.

At the time, however, *spolia* studies were more affected by an unexpected and compelling article of 1969 by the German historian Arnold Esch. Drawing on an extraordinary knowledge of mostly Italian examples, Esch deduced five

essential explanations for *spolia*: convenience and availability; profanation or exorcism of demonic force; ***interpretatio christiana***; retrodating or political legitimation (Bandmann's Rome "transferred in pieces"); and aesthetic wonderment or admiration ("reuse at any cost"). All of these motives had already been suggested; indeed, Hamann-MacLean produced almost the same list twenty years before. The originality of Esch's contribution lay in the recognition of *spolia* as a distinctive cultural practice, which could be isolated and analyzed on its own terms rather than as a subset of classical survival. His article defined a field.

As often happens, the impact of Esch's article was not seen for over a decade. Victor Lassalle's book of 1970 on the influence of antiquity on Romanesque art in Provence remained in the framework created by Adhémar, although it recognized "reuses" (*remplois*) as a distinctive category. Like Viollet-le-Duc, Lassalle attributed most reuse to the technical impoverishment of early medieval masons and sculptors, but in some twelfth-century examples he discerned "the intention to present . . . especially notable antique vestiges for everyone's admiration." He did not believe that reuse could be creative, however, and he dismissed the topic after only four pages.[26]

In 1983, in an essay directly influenced by Esch, Beat Brenk extended the notion of *spolia* as "art politics" (*Kunstpolitik*) to Abbot Suger's plan to bring columns from Rome to St Denis.[27] This was the first lap of what quickly became a flood of *spolia* studies, composed of publications so diffuse that they are difficult to track and even harder to categorize. Joachim Poeschke attributed the new fascination with *spolia* to the turn of art history in the 1980s to content and program (as opposed to form), as well as to the "language of materials."[28] There were other motivations as well, including an Anglo-Italian revival of interest in Warburgian problems, and a vogue for treasury exhibitions and their catalogues, which made objects like the Herimann Cross more prominent. Not surprisingly, such diverse and uncoordinated stimuli produced multiple, erratically connected lines of scholarship.

The neo-Warburgian strain is represented by the three-volume *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana* (1984–6), sponsored by Salvatore Settis in Pisa. Settis' own essay, "Continuity, distance, knowledge. Three uses of the antique," is an intellectual *tour de force* that takes on Warburg, Panofsky, and the whole of German scholarship on the afterlife of classical antiquity, offering brilliant insights into *spolia* along the way. As an authentic medieval metaphor for excerpting what was usable from classical authors, *spolia* is Settis' leitmotif for the Middle Ages, the period of continuity. Citations and topoi are *spolia*; conversely, spoliate objects are citations. Excised from their original (ruined) context, citations assume the authority (*auctoritas*) of the no longer usable whole.

> The ancient fragment, enclosed within a new system of values, immediately tends to occupy the center; but its imperfect, mutilated state invites you . . . to complete it, beginning an exegetical process . . . of conjecture. It is an almost empty center, and to fill it it is not enough to squeeze from that single fragment all of the norms that it contains; it lets you make out that there were other [norms], and challenges you to find them.

Thus the single spoliate column embodied Rome in all its aspects: "the *auctoritas* that the Roman column carried with it was that of the city – . . . capital of the imperial majesty and of Christianity; but also, at the same time, the *auctoritas* of a technical proficiency and of decorative and structural norms that were of one body with that majesty."[29]

Like many scholars, Settis assigned gems a special place. He argued that placing them in crosses or reliquaries was a deliberate means of neutralizing their pagan significance, which made *interpretatio christiana* unnecessary or after the fact. As objects of intrinsic value, gems were the model for "all reuse of antiquities for preservation or display."[30]

Settis' reflections on *spolia*, arguably the most challenging of the present era, have not yet received the attention they deserve outside Italy. More influential was Michael Greenhalgh's book of 1989, which also stands within the Warburgian framework although at the opposite pole of intellectual pretension. Explicitly devoted to "objects not ideas," Greenhalgh's overview of the survival of antiquities in Italy, Northern Europe, and England differs from previous efforts like Adhémar's in being restricted to material remains, ignoring literary, ideological, and other purely verbal components of the classical legacy.[31] Like Adhémar, Greenhalgh focused on survival, but reuse and *spolia* are much more prominently featured in his account. Greenhalgh's compendium made the topic of reuse visible and easily accessible in English, and despite occasional inaccuracies, it is a goldmine of primary and secondary sources for researchers.

Outside the Warburg tradition, the survival of Rome ceased to drive interest in reuse. Medieval treasuries contain artifacts from many eras and cultures, and scholars began to address this.[32] In the late 1980s, Hiltrud Westermann-Angerhausen, Lieselotte Stamm-Saurma, and others expanded the definition of *spolia* to include objects that were virtually new at the time of their reuse (e.g., a tenth-century Byzantine ivory in an eleventh-century book cover).[33] Julie Harris drew attention to the Islamic caskets that entered Spanish church treasuries as true *spolia* – as booty of the Christian Reconquest; and Avinoam Shalem provided a more comprehensive view of the means by which such objects passed into treasuries throughout Europe.[34]

At the same time, attention to ancient gems continued to be strong, liberated by new interpretive strategies from the strict dualities of pagan/Christian and classical/medieval. Most of this new scholarship is in German. Antje Krug's overview of ancient gems in the Middle Ages (1993) refreshed the standard account by introducing such contemporary concepts as status symbols, charisma, and heirlooms, in addition to grave-robbing, trade, connoisseurship, and humor. Her portrait of medieval collectors firmly contradicts the stereotype of credulous ignorance:[35]

> We find here not a naive inability to recover the original sense of the pagan representations, nor superstitious fear of the reality of the old images that one sought to oppose with Christian content . . . but the capacity to recognize [pagan subjects] and to read them in more than one sense.

Taking a different approach, Erika Zwierlein-Diehl went back to Panofsky's principle of disjunction to restate the case for *interpretatio christiana*: "we may take it for granted that . . . gems . . . were given a Christian meaning when placed in medieval sacred objects."[36] Her reconstruction of the *interpretatio christiana* that might have been applied to the gems on the Shrine of the Three Kings in Cologne brings this interpretive model up-to-date with an understated application of semiotic principles and reception theory.[37]

North American and British scholars made their belated entrance into *spolia* studies in the 1990s. American contributions tend to reflect the larger discourse of art history on that continent, especially its preoccupation with the political instrumentality of history. George Beech's account of the "Eleanor of Aquitaine Vase" given by Abbot Suger to St Denis is an example; so is William Clark's interpretation of the reuse of marble column shafts in twelfth-century churches in Paris (1997).[38] A finely worded essay by Ilene Forsyth characterizes a number of Ottonian objects, including the crosses of Lothar and Herimann and the ambo of Henry II, as "art with history": "made up of concrete remains of ancient Roman, Early Christian, Byzantine, Fatimid, Frankish, Anglo-Saxon, Merovingian, Carolingian, and/or earlier Ottonian artifacts which in sum represent the cultural foundations of the Ottonian era." Forsyth proposed that these "aggregates" were "artistic statement[s] expressing a triumph of the whole over its own component parts, the present over its varied past."[39]

By contrast, the British discovery of *spolia* seems critically innocent, even of the prior literature on *spolia*. David Stocker's seminal article on building stone proposed three categories of reuse: casual, functional, and iconic, without reference to any previous categorizations such as Esch's. In Stocker's scheme, "casual" reuse occurs when "the function of the original stone is disregarded"; it is "functional" when an element is reused for the purpose for which it was made; and it is "iconic" when a particular stone is reused because of its associations, history, or "superstitious power." Stocker's categories seem roughly equivalent to Esch's motives of convenience (= casual and functional), *interpretatio christiana*, exorcism and legitimation (= iconic); they do not explicitly recognize aesthetic beguilement.[40]

Tim Eaton's *Plundering the Past* (2000) provides a useful synthesis of recent British scholarship on architectural reuse, and also debunks some common assumptions about the practice and its motivations. He is critical of Stocker's classification, noting that it confuses descriptive labels ("casual" and "functional") with explanation. Eaton's remedy is drastic, collapsing all possibilities into just two categories of intention: "practical" (which includes "economy, convenience, professional preference [and] technological necessity") and "meaningful" (including "an appreciation of the material's age-value [and] esotericism").[41]

Books on *spolia* are still rare. Lucilla de Lachenal's was the first attempt to survey the entire subject, but it is overwhelmingly focused on Italy. The few remarks on Ottonian art are dominated by the paradigm of "the antique as the legitimation of [political] power" and are out of touch with contemporary scholarship on objects like the Lothar Cross.[42]

While de Lachenal treats all perpetuations of ancient Roman material and literary culture as *spolia*, the multi-authored *Antike Spolien* promotes a much narrower definition, confined to the reuse of materials in architecture.[43] Of the dozen essays in this volume, three discuss buildings in post-millennium Northern Europe. Cord Meckseper inventories *spolia* imported for the Ottonian cathedral at Magdeburg; Joachim Poeschke briefly discusses Magdeburg's thirteenth-century choir and the façade of St Remi at Reims; and Thomas Weigel responds to Thomas Raff's position that *spolia*, like relics, were valued for authenticity and venerability rather than for aesthetic reasons. Weigel marshals primary sources to show that even a programmatic use of *spolia* did not exclude regard for their beauty, quality, or size.

Another conference publication, the acts of the forty-sixth annual "Study Week" of the Italian Center for Study of the Early Middle Ages in Spoleto (1999), though mostly about Italy, contains some papers of broader relevance.[44] Umberto Eco offers a semiotic model for medieval approaches to citation (a form of reuse), which he illustrates with a metaphorical garment. The life of a jacket can be prolonged by reversal, mending, patching, adaptation, and, finally, dismemberment to be incorporated elsewhere as patchwork or *bricolage*. All of these processes alter the original, and Eco's point is that medieval citation always expresses new content disguised by reuse.[45]

Anthony Cutler's call for a distinction between reuse and use is especially relevant to the discussion of gems. In Cutler's view, the difference turns on the intention of the (re)user and the reception of the altered or recontextualized artifact. He maintains that unlike people today, medievals accepted the "mutability" of objects and valued them "as much [for their] utility in the present and in the foreseeable future as [for their] antiquity."[46]

Conclusion

The study of *spolia* is in a dynamic state of becoming, working itself out through what might be called a trialectic of specific, general, and theoretical publications. The process is illustrated by a recent series of attempts to recover the meaning of the Lothar Cross.

On the basis of a systematic study of all gemmed crosses, Theo Jülich argued that these objects were multilayered signs alluding to the crucifixion, second coming, and heavenly dominion of Christ. He concluded that a portrait in the

center of such a cross could not have represented a donor, as had been the prevailing opinion of the Lothar Cross since Deér. Citing a medieval exegete who interpreted sardonyx as a sign of the two natures of Christ, Jülich insisted that the sardonyx cameo on the Lothar Cross must have represented Christ as ruler in heaven.[47]

Approaching the "iconology as a *spolium*" of the same cameo, Norbert Wibiral began with the semiotic premise, grounded in an eighth-century source, that "expressions of content in art are often polyvalent." He asserted that in its Ottonian adaptation, the central cameo represented the Emperor Augustus, not (only) as himself but in his medieval Christian function as *figura*, the image of Christ in his first and second coming.[48]

Both interpretations employ appropriate historical sources and reasoning, so on purely historical grounds it is impossible to choose between them. Ilene Forsyth's explanation operates on another plane; it provides a general pattern for interpreting the Lothar Cross and other objects like it. The pattern accommodates Wibiral's specific interpretation but not Jülich's. Forsyth's categorical account depends on a conception of *spolia* as – in medieval eyes – embodiments of history.

Philippe Buc's article on the "Conversion of Objects" operates on the same plane but offers a somewhat different model, informed by social-historical theories of the "life of things." Buc proposes that "object-conversion [as when an ancient Roman object is given to a church treasury] establishes a relationship of superiority" of the object's present status over its past, and "signifies a transfer of power one hopes to freeze into eternity." In the particular case of object-donations to St Denis, such as the Eagle Vase, Buc argues that the objects' illustrious past ownership and varied histories created a "memorial network" for Abbot Suger, auguring salvation by commemorating his place "at the center of a web defined by his age's most famous figures of power."[49]

The categorical explanations of Forsyth and Buc both posit history as an essential attribute of *spolia* or converted objects. In this respect both are challenged by the still more abstract question posed by Cutler: were ancient gems, vessels, and other such objects *reused* by their medieval donors, or just *used*? In Cutler's distinction, reuse is "at least in part, a historicist gesture," while use is driven by present value or need.

Theo Jülich undoubtedly would opt for use. Like Antje Krug and Erika Zwierlein-Diehl, Jülich avoids the term *spolia*, preferring "gems" or "cameos" or the name of the material – "sardonyx," "amethyst," etc. Items of use are open to a broader array of interpretive models than *spolia*, as seen in Thomas Raff's exposition of the medieval "iconology of materials." Defining the "iconology of materials" as the "semantics, symbolism, and allegory" of the substances of which art is made, Raff explicitly addresses *spolia* in an excursus. He explains that he did not reserve a particular chapter for *spolia* because he finds the fact of reuse less significant than the properties of a material and the reasons for choosing it. Consequently he dispersed cases of reuse among chapters on other topics: "Material as Relic," "Materials as Topographical References," and "Materials as Historical References."[50]

These and other examples indicate that the historiography of *spolia* cannot be confined to *spolia*. Raff rejects the category and Buc never uses the word. Avinoam Shalem showed that *spolia* ("trophies") would be far too restrictive a label for Islamic treasury objects, which were also gifts, commodities, and souvenirs. Rather than a corpus of objects, *spolia* is a still evolving analytic concept, which functions like a spotlight to make objects appear momentarily different. The objects themselves are both more and less than they appear.

Notes

1 Kinney, "*Spolia*," pp. 121–2.
2 "Chronicon Hugonis monachi virdunensis et divionensis abbatis flaviniacensis," in Pertz, ed., *Monumenta*, pp. 351–2; Schlosser, *Schriftquellen*, p. 248.
3 Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen*, pp. 410–11.
4 Dutton, trans., *Charlemagne's Courtier*, p. 32; Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, pp. 90–1; Warner, trans., *Ottonian Germany*, p. 104.
5 Garton, trans., *Metrical Life*, pp. 54–7.
6 [On the sumptuous arts, see chapter 22 by Buettner in this volume (ed.).]
7 Wentzel, "Mittelalterliche Gemmen," p. 49.
8 Riddle, *Marbode of Rennes*; Wickoff, trans., *Albertus Magnus*, pp. 65, 128, 131.
9 Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, pp. 56–67, 72–3, 76–9, 102–9.
10 [On patronage, see chapter 9 by Caskey in this volume (ed.).]
11 Wright, "Antiquarian Excavations," p. 447; Snijder, "Antique and Medieval," p. 17.
12 L'Orange, *Spätantike Bildschmuck*, pp. 161–91.
13 Deichmann, "Säule und Ordnung."
14 Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné*, vol. 3, pp. 491–6; vol. 6, p. 317.
15 Jantzen, *Ottonische Kunst*, pp. 17–18, 23–7.
16 Bandmann, *Mittelalterliche Architektur*, p. 145.
17 Götz, "Magdeburger Domchor."
18 <http:www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/institute/institute_introduction.htm> (consulted August 2004).
19 Heckscher, "Relics of Pagan Antiquity," pp. 220, 217.
20 Adhémar, *Influences antiques*.
21 Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, pp. 15–26.
22 Wentzel, "Mittelalterliche Gemmen," p. 46, n.1 *bis*, p. 49.
23 Hamann-MacLean, "Antikenstudium," pp. 161–73.
24 Taralon, "La Nouvelle Présentation," pp. 123–4; Taralon and Taralon-Carlini, "La Majesté d'or"; Hoster, "Wiener Ptolemäerkameo."
25 Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences*, pp. 84, 88.
26 Lassalle, *L'Influence antique*, pp. 13–16.
27 Brenk, "Sugers Spolien."
28 Poeschke, "Einleitung," in *Antike Spolien*, p. 9.
29 Settis, "Continuità," pp. 421–2.

30 Ibid., pp. 478–80.
31 Greenhalgh, *Survival*, p. 7.
32 [On treasuries, see chapter 10 by Mariaux in this volume (ed.).]
33 Westermann-Angerhausen, "Spolie und Umfeld"; Stamm-Saurma, "Die 'auctoritas' des Zitates."
34 Harris, "Muslim Ivories"; Shalem, *Islam Christianized*.
35 Krug, "Antike Gemmen," p. 167. [On collecting, see chapter 10 by Mariaux in this volume (ed.).]
36 Zwierlein-Diehl, "*Interpretatio christiana*," p. 70.
37 [On reception, see chapter 3 by Caviness in this volume (ed.).]
38 Beech, "The Eleanor of Aquitaine Vase"; Clark, "Defining National Historical Memory."
39 Forsyth, "Art with History," p. 153.
40 Stocker and Everson, "Rubbish Recycled."
41 Eaton, *Plundering the Past*, p. 135.
42 De Lachenal, *Spolia*, pp. 7, 152.
43 Poeschke, "Einleitung," in *Antike Spolien*, pp. 7–9.
44 *Ideologie e pratiche del reimpiego nell'alto medioevo. 16–21 aprile 1998* (Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo, 46) (Spoleto, 1999), 2 vols.
45 Eco, "Riflessioni."
46 Cutler, "Reuse or Use?"
47 Jülich, "Sakrale Gegenstände," pp. 254–6.
48 Wibiral, "*Augustus patrem figurat*," pp. 105–6, 119–20.
49 Buc, "Conversion of Objects," pp. 110, 138, 123–7.
50 Raff, *Sprache der Materialien*, pp. 9, 72–4.

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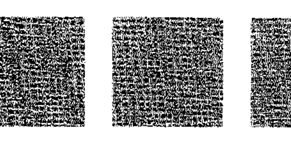
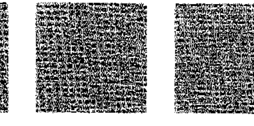
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12

The Monstrous

Thomas E. A. Dale

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the interpretation of the monstrous in Romanesque and Gothic art has been significantly influenced by a single text: St Bernard of Clairvaux's *Apologia* composed in 1125 for Abbot William of St Thierry. After a broader critique of religious art, Bernard asks:

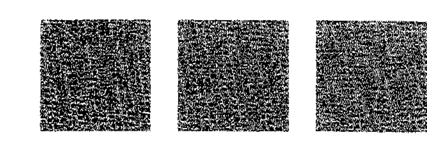
> [I]n the cloisters, before the eyes of the brothers while they read – what is that ridiculous monstrosity doing, an amazing kind of deformed beauty and yet a beautiful deformity? What are the filthy apes doing there? The fierce lions? The monstrous centaurs? The creatures part man part beast? . . . You may see many bodies under one head, and conversely many heads on one body. On one side the tail of a serpent is seen on a quadruped, on the other side, the head of a quadruped is on the body of a fish. Over there an animal has a horse for the front half and a goat for the back; here a creature which is horned in front is equine behind. In short, everywhere so plentiful and astonishing a variety of contradictory forms is seen that one would rather read in the marble than in books, and spend the whole day wondering at every single one of them than in meditating on the law of God.[1]

Without describing any particular cloister, Bernard evokes beautifully both the diversity of the monstrous and the complex reactions to it. His account highlights three categories that defined the monstrous for Christian writers since the early Middle Ages, including Augustine and Isidore of Seville: animals made monstrous by the superfluity or absence of parts such as the double-bodied lions joined to a single head; hybrid animals combining different species; and finally, one semi-human hybrid, the centaur. To his representative examples one could add the ubiquitous sirens and the Plinian races inhabiting the margins of the known world; indeed, by the fourteenth century, Sir John Mandeville could define the monster quite simply as "a thing deformed against kind, both of man or of beast or of anything else."

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